

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, today is an opportunity for us in the next 45 minutes to talk about a celebration. We have had some pretty serious business under discussion here on the Senate Floor, and today I and my colleague, Senator *Stevens*, joined by others, rise to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Senate passage of the Alaska Statehood Act, the act which eventually conveyed statehood upon the great State of Alaska after a fight for equal rights and representation that lasted literally decades.

After a long and contentious battle, both in Congress and across the country, the Senate passed the Alaska Statehood Act 50 years ago, on June 30, by a vote of 64 to 20. The act was signed into law 7 days later by President Eisenhower, and Alaska officially became a State on January 3, 1959. This was the headline in the Anchorage Daily News announcing, ``We're In." Our territorial Governor, Mike Stepovich, President Eisenhower, and Secretary Seaton are in this photo that we look to in our State's very young history with great fondness.

This year across the State, there will be celebrations all over put on by communities, by clubs, by businesses, by the State government. To help kick off this celebration, I would like to briefly remember a little bit of the history of a very rough journey toward statehood.

The territory of Alaska was bought from Russia in 1867. I know many students, when they are looking at their history books, learn that it was dubbed ``Seward's Folly." It was World War II and the Cold War that really transformed the face of Alaska, however. Having a strategically critical location for both wars, Alaska saw a large increase in Federal money and population in the 1930s and the 1940s.

While the aspiration for statehood had existed for many years and though Alaska had a delegate to Congress since 1906, it was during this time period that a serious and motivated and modern statehood movement rose up and captured the attention of Alaskans across the State.

The Alaska Statehood Committee was formed in 1949. This committee of 11 Alaskans was bipartisan. No more than six could belong to the same party, and at least two members had to come from each of the four judicial districts Alaska had at the time. They were given the task of publicizing and educating the public on statehood, both in Alaska and nationally, as well as framing a State constitution.

As early as 1946, though, 3 years before the Statehood Committee was formed, there was a large majority of Americans who were already very supportive of Alaskan statehood. A Gallup Poll that year indicated that 64 percent of Americans were in favor of statehood, with only 12 percent opposed. The percentage of supportive Americans grew to 81 percent by 1950. But even then, nearly a decade still remained in what became a bitter battle against special interests.

The wealthy salmon canning industry was the primary lobbying group that opposed statehood at the time. The salmon cannery would put fish traps at the mouth of some of Alaska's largest rivers, and they caught nearly 30 percent of Alaska's salmon every year, sending the yearly salmon catch plummeting from 924 million pounds to 360 million pounds over a 20-year period. Alaska was in a tough spot. They were powerless to resist. With 99 percent of the territory's land owned by the Federal Government and with very little control over resource policy, the industry

was pretty much free to devastate one of the State's most valuable renewable resources, and that was our Alaskan salmon.

This desire for a say in our own affairs only grew the intense desire of Alaskans to attain statehood for themselves. The newspaper the New York Journal-American summed up the situation this way:

Alaska wants statehood with the fervor men and women give to a transcendent cause. An overwhelming number of men and women voters in the United States want statehood for Alaska. This Nation needs Alaskan statehood to advance her defense, sustain her security, and discharge her deep moral obligation.

In 1950, after years of thwarted attempts to bring an Alaska statehood bill to the floor of either Chamber of Congress despite the strong support of President Truman, a bill actually got a floor vote. It passed the House of Representatives, but it failed over here in the Senate.

Frustrated by repeated legislative defeats, Alaskans

decided to write a State constitution. This was done in 1955. We decided to do it to show the country that we were politically mature and genuinely ready for statehood.

After a 75-day Constitutional Convention at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, a constitution was adopted by the delegates and ratified by Alaskans. It was later described by the National Municipal League as "one of the best, if not the best state constitutions ever written."

The way it dealt with natural resources was particularly distinctive and ingenious. The State's natural resources were viewed as a public trust and were required to be developed for "maximum use consistent with the public interest [and] for the maximum benefit of its people." Development based on "sustainable yield" was constitutionally mandated. To this day, the State continues to operate on this principle in our fisheries, minerals, fossil fuel development, and our timber. One example of the results of this policy is that Alaska is the only region in the United States that has no overfished fish stocks.

Two years after the constitution was ratified and 50 years ago, on May 28, the House of Representatives voted on the bill that would eventually confer statehood upon Alaska. The bill passed the House 210 to 166. The Senate passed it 64 to 20, and then President Eisenhower signed it into law. Over 15 years passed between April 2, 1943, when the first bill was introduced, and June 30, 1958, when the final bill was passed. We were officially a State on January 3, 1959.

I have been perusing the *Congressional Record* to kind of get a sense of the Senate debate at the time, the debate that preceded Alaska's entry into the American Union. I am a born and raised Alaskan. I have found the record absolutely fascinating. It includes enthusiastic and very passionate arguments in favor of statehood but also countered by lawmakers who saw Alaska's entry into the Union as being a huge mistake. There is even an occasional Communist threat reference, a reminder that this debate occurred against the backdrop of the Cold War.

Some of the arguments against statehood included the fact that Alaska was not contiguous with the rest of the United States; Alaska was not sufficiently developed economically or politically to be ready for statehood. There was also a reference to the fact that Alaska doesn't produce enough agriculture.

There were provisions granting Federal land to the State. They alleged it was a huge Federal giveaway, but keep in mind that the Federal Government still owns over half of the State of Alaska. But really the argument centered around the concern that Alaska would be a huge burden on the Federal Government financially.

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Senator Richard Neuberger of Oregon, who was a supporter and was presiding over the Senate during the historic Alaska statehood rollcall vote, said that Alaska statehood would afford the United States the opportunity to show that ``we practice what we preach."

Neuberger said:

For decades we have preached democracy to the rest of the world, yet we have denied full self-government to our vast outposts to the north, despite many assurances that such would not be the case.

He continued on by saying:

The voice of America may talk of democracy, but its message will ring hollowly through the rest of the Free World if America fails to practice democracy. In the crucible of world opinion, we shall be tested by deeds and not words. Statehood for Alaska will be a tangible deed.

Among Alaska's greatest friends in the Senate were both Senators from Washington State, Henry ``Scoop" Jackson and Warren Magnuson. Jackson told his colleagues that the time was ``past due" for the admission of Alaska to the Union, while Magnuson said it in another way. He said:

Alaska has sat impatiently in the anteroom of history for 42 years.

These comments represent only a fraction of the Alaska statehood debate which began years before the last frontier became the 49th State, but still they offer some valuable perspective on the challenges and obstacles our forefathers faced on the road to statehood.

A few of my colleagues will be joining us over the next half hour or so to help remember and reenact the debate that occurred 50 years ago. I am grateful for their willingness to join me in celebrating our 50th anniversary of the 49th star on the flag.

I mentioned that Alaska has been referred to as ``Seward's Folly." I don't think many people know that we also were referred to as ``Icebergia," obviously a reference to the colder environment up there. But Alaska has since made incredibly significant contributions to our great

Nation. I do not think anyone considers Alaska a folly. We provide 55 percent of America's seafood, we attracted 1.5 million tourists last summer to the State, and we have been a stable domestic supplier of U.S. oil needs for the past 30 years.

Alaska is proud to be ``the Great Land" in the greatest Nation in the world. I am privileged to represent its people here in the United States.

With that, I yield the floor to my senior colleague, Senator *Stevens*.